DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 218 908 EC 143 181

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TITLE Factors Related to Burnout: A Review of Research.
PUB DATE Apr 82
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (60th, Houston, TX, April 11-16, 1982, Session Th-74). Print is light and may not reproduce well.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Age Differences; *Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; Job Satisfaction; *Locus of Control; Sex Differences; *Teacher Burnout; *Teacher Characteristics; Teacher Morale

ABSTRACT

Surveys were completed by 469 special education teachers to investigate the relationship of locus of control to teach burnout. Locus of control was found to correlate significantly with four of six dimensions on the Maslach Behavior Inventory. As teachers reported more external orientation, they also reported a greater degree of burnout. No statistically significant correlations were found between burnout and teaching position, grade level taught, type of child taught, level of education, student load, size of district, and marital status. Increasing age was significantly correlated with more frequent feelings of personal accomplishment and negatively correlated with both frequency and intensity dimensions of the emotional exhaustion subscale, and stronger feelings of depersonalization. Males had significantly fewer feelings of personal accomplishment than females and scored higher on both dimensions of the depersonalization scale. Area of college preparation, years of experience, and desire to remain in teaching were also related to burnout. (CL)

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Paper presented at 1982 Council for Exceptional Children International Convention, Houston, Texas, April 16, 1982.

FACTORS RELATED TO BURNOUT: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH

The area of teacher burnout is presently receiving a great deal of attention in paper presentations, inservice sessions and professional literature. Most of this work, however, has been conjectural or poorly designed. The current study was conducted in order to better understand the phenomenon as it occurs among special education teachers, and to evaluate the influence of a psychological variable known as locus of control, along with other selected background variables.

The current study is based upon the work of Maslach & Jackson (1979) who defined burnout as a perceived state of emotional exhaustion, negative attitude toward clients, and lack of personal accomplishment. These authors devised the Maslach Burnout Inventory to measure those perceived feelings. It contains three subscales: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment. For each of these subscales, separate scores are provided for frequency and intensity of those feelings. Teachers perceiving themselves as being "burned out" would have higher scores on the Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization subscales while scoring lower on Personal Accomplishment. There is no clear cut point at which someone becomes "burned out", rather that person is placed on a continuum from perceiving lower feelings of burnout to higher feelings of burnout.

The concept of locus of control is based on the work of Rotter (1966). Locus of control is the degree to which one feels control or influence over events occurring which affect him/her. Nowicki & Strickland (1973) developed

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the Nowicki-Strickland Adult Internal-External Scale in order to measure this variable. A low score on this instrument indicates that a person feels very influential in obtaining personal reinforcement. This person is said to have an "internal" locus of control. A high score indicates that a person attributes a great deal of power to luck, fate, chance, or powerful others. This person is labeled as being "external" in orientation.

All data for this study were collected using a mailed questionnaire consisting of three sections. Part one asked respondents to provide background concerning themselves, their teaching position, and whether, if free to choose, would they remain in the teaching profession. In part two, teachers were asked to complete the Maslach Burnout Inventory, and in part three, to complete the Nowicki-Strickland scale. All special education teachers from 28 volunteer school districts in Connecticut and 1 in Massachusetts, were asked to complete the instrument. The data utilized for this study were based on the surveys completed by 469 teachers representing a response rate of 69%.

This study had two specific purposes: (1) to determine if a psychological variable, locus of control, and a number of background variables were significantly related to degree of teacher burnout, and (2) to determine if groups within the selected variables differ significantly from each other with respect to degree of teacher burnout. The correlated variables were evaluated using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation technique. The differences between groups were compared using one-way analysis of variance or a t-test. Partial Correlation was later conducted for all variables to partial out the effects of all the remaining variables.

Fortran program RDIF was used to assess the difference between the simple correlations and each of the partial correlations obtained with statistical control of the combinations of the remaining variables.

The findings of this study and how they relate to previous findings reported in the literature are discussed below. For the purpose of clarity, hypotheses one, two, and three will be discussed in combination. Simple correlations remain unchanged by partial correlation analysis unless otherwise noted.

Findings for Null Hypothesis 1, Null Hypothesis 2, and Null Hypothesis 3

Ho_1 There will be no significant relationship among perceived frequency and intensity on the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment subscales of burnout, locus of control, and the selected background factors of sex, age, race, marital status, grade level assignment, level of education, student load, years of teaching experience, years in present assignment, and size of district.

Ho_2 There will be no significant differences between perceived frequency and intensity of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment subscales of burnout, locus of control, and the selected background variables of sex, age, race, marital status, teaching assignment, grade level assignment, type of student taught, level of education, area of college preparation, student load, years of teaching experience, years in present assignment, size of district, and desire to remain in teaching.

Ho_3 There will be no significant relationships between each of the pairs of variables when all remaining variables are statistically controlled.

Finding 1

Locus of control, the degree to which one feels control over various aspects of one's life, was found to correlate significantly with 4 of the 6 dimensions of the MBI, while exhibiting a trend ($p=.053$ after partial correlation) with the fifth (strength of feelings of personal accomplishment). As scores on the Nowicki-Strickland Adult Scale for Locus of Control increased, indicating a more external life orientation, scores on both dimensions of the Emotional Exhaustion and the strength of Depersonalization subscales also increased, while the frequency of feelings of personal accomplishment decreased. These results indicate that as teachers report a more external orientation, they

also report a greater degree of burnout. These findings are in concert with what would be expected from reviewing related literature which shows internals coping better with stress. The findings are also similar with those of Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979) who found teachers with an external orientation reporting significantly more job related stress.

Using a question which appears reflective of one which might assess locus of control, Meadow (1981) compared answers on the question, "Are you given the opportunity to influence your own work situation or assignment?" with responses to the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Those who reported a greater degree of personal control within the work environment also reported less emotional exhaustion, lessened depersonalization and a greater sense of personal accomplishment. Meadows' results would be in concert with the findings of the present study.

Recommendations

Further examination and investigation into the connection between locus of control and burnout is warranted, although not within the scope of this study. Use of a regression procedure, for example, would assess the amount of variance in burnout which is explained by locus of control.

A question remains as to whether one variable might be causing the other to change. That is, does the process of "burning out" change one's locus of control, or does one's original orientation make one more susceptible to burn out? One strategy, given research which indicates that locus of control can be changed (Harrow & Terrante, 1969; Smither, 1970; Gottesfeld & Dozier, 1966), would be to attempt change in orientation for external, burned out teachers. This change could be verified by readministration of the locus instrument, and reassessment of perceptions of burnout via readministration

of the MBI in order to see if locus of control change effected level of burnout.

Another option would be to conduct a study involving internally oriented persons entering the teaching profession. Periodic retesting on the MBI and locus instrument would document the connection, if any, between the two variables.

Finding 2

When the variables of teaching position, grade level taught, type of child taught, level of education and marital status were evaluated with respect to burnout via correlational and analysis of variance techniques, no statistically significant findings were revealed.

A number of these findings are contrary to previous findings in burnout research.

Marital Status. Maslach & Jackson (1979) and Gann (1979) found marital status and level of education to significantly affect the degree of burnout. Specifically, they found single and divorced people perceiving stronger feelings of emotional exhaustion than those who were married.

Raison (1981), using the MBI, found non-married regular education teachers reporting greater frequency of emotional exhaustion and more intense feelings of depersonalization, while special educators who were divorced, separated, or widowed reported more intense and frequent feelings of emotional exhaustion. Schwab (1980), however, found no marital status differences with respect to burnout as measured by the MBI.

Level of Education. Both Gann (1979) and Maslach & Jackson (1979) found that people who had attained higher degree levels scored higher on the Emotional Exhaustion subscale, higher on the Personal Accomplishment subscale, and lower on the Depersonalization subscale.

Schwab (1980), however, in a study of teachers, found no significant differences due to level of education which agrees with the findings of this study. Schwab believed that level of education did not have an effect because obtaining a higher degree does not change a teacher's status in the organization or change his/her job definition as it would in other professions.

Teaching Position. No significant differences were found between resource room teachers and teachers in self-contained classes with respect to burnout. These results appear contrary to those of a study by Bensky, et al. (1980) who found 114 regular education teachers and resource room teachers who were taking a graduate course reporting a median response of "sometimes" to the question "Do you perceive your job to be stressful?" while classroom teachers had a median response of "seldom."

Apparent differences may be due to the differing measures of assessment or the different populations used in the studies.

In another study, which used the MBI, Raison (1981) found resource room teachers reporting higher scores on both dimensions of the emotional exhaustion subscale and less frequent feelings of personal accomplishment than those in self-contained classrooms.

Grade Level Taught. When teachers were grouped into the categories of preschool, elementary, middle/junior high, or high school grade levels, no significant differences were found between the groups. In addition, no significant correlations were found between grade level taught and burnout.

In comparison, Schwab (1980) found both middle school/junior high and high school teachers scoring higher on the two dimensions of the Depersonalization subscale than their elementary grade level counterparts. These same teachers also reported less frequent and less intense feelings of personal accomplishment when compared to the elementary school group. Schwab had

questions as to whether his results reflected a sex difference due to the large percentage of females teaching in elementary schools.

One explanation for differences between this study and that of Schwab with respect to grade level taught might be due to the nature of regular education (the main focus of Schwab's study) and special education. Regular educators in middle and high schools see a different group of students during esch class period, while those in elementary school deal with the same group all day. Perhaps this contributed to the differences between the two groups in Schwab's study. For special educators in resource and self contained rooms however, the student responsibilities at the different levels are essentially the same. Therefore, there is not the contrast in job responsibility which is evident in regular education.

Recommendations

Because the findings of no marital group differences with respect to burnout by Schwab (1980) and this study conflict with those of Raison (1981), other studies investigating this phenomenon are necessary. Perhaps the influence of a third variable such as years in marriage, supportiveness of spouse, stability of the marriage or quality of the singles lifestyle is an important factor. Number of children was found not to be a factor according to Schwab's research.

The differences in findings between this study, and those of Bensky et al. (1980) and Raison (1981) with respect to teaching position require more studies to clarify why these differences exist. Perhaps another factor such as school atmosphere, regional differences, type of child taught, or the difference in population size between this study and the others must be examined to provide an appropriate explanation.

The discrepancy between this study and that of Schwab (1980) with respect to grade level differences on burnout demands more research to determine why this discontinuity exists. A study utilizing the MBI with a pure sample of regular educators (Schwab used a sample which included both regular and special educators) would allow for a comparison between special and regular education teachers. This study, as well as another with special educators to compare with the present study, should control for the variable of sex which may have had an effect on Schwab's results.

Finding 3

Older special education teachers were found to be faring better with respect to burnout than their younger colleagues. Increasing age was found to be significantly correlated with more frequent feelings of personal accomplishment and negatively correlated with both the frequency and intensity dimensions of the Emotional Exhaustion subscale, and stronger feelings of depersonalization.

Raison (1981) found the same results as stated above and also found younger teachers feeling more frequent depersonalization. However, in this study, when the effects of years of teaching and years in present assignment were controlled for by use of partial correlation, the only significant correlation left was a negative correlation between increasing age and strength of feelings of emotional exhaustion.

These results are then the same as those of Schwab (1980), who found younger teachers to feel more "burned out" only on the intensity section of the Emotional Exhaustion subscale, while Maslach & Jackson found younger social service professionals to experience burnout on all subscales of the MBI.

The teachers in this study were also categorized according to age as follows: 20 to 30, 31 to 40, 41 to 50, and over 50 years of age. Significant differences between groups were found. The teachers in the two youngest age groupings scored significantly higher on both dimensions of the emotional exhaustion subscale than their colleagues in the two older groupings. On the frecuency of feelings of personal accomplishment dimension, teachers in the 41 to 50 age group reported the greatest feelings of personal accomplishment. No other group differences were found.

Recommendations

Studies should be designed to investigate why the findings of Schwab (1980) and this study differ from those of Raison (1981). Investigations could also focus on regular education teachers in particular in order to compare them with the special educators in this study. Other research endeavors might investigate why teachers differ from those in other professions in their perceptions of burnout or perhaps investigate the reasons why younger persons consistently appear more "burned out" than their older colleagues. Possibly expertise and job satisfaction come with age or perhaps most "burned out" teachers drop out of the profession, leaving a greater percentage of "burned out" teachers in the younger groupings.

Finding 4

When special educators were grouped according to the background variable of sex, males had significantly fewer feelings of personal accomplishment than females and scored higher on both dimensions of the Depersonalization subscale indicating that they had more frecuent and intense feelings of negative attitudes toward their students.

These findings are in agreement with the results of Schwab (1980), while

being in partial agreement with those of Raison (1981), and Maslach & Jackson (1979). All three authors obtained the same higher scores for males on the Depersonalization subscale, but Schwab also found males scoring lower on the frequency part of the Personal Accomplishment subscale, while Maslach & Jackson found males scoring higher on both of the dimensions of Personal Accomplishment. Maslach and Jackson also found males feeling less emotionally exhausted than females while this study and that of Schwab found no significant difference.

Maslach & Jackson (1979) insist that caution must be exercised in the interpretation of their results with regard to sex because of the many different occupations involved in their study. Some of these occupations (policeman, psychiatrist, physician) tended to be male dominated, while others were female oriented (social worker, counselor, nurse), thus making it difficult to determine if differences in burnout perceptions were attributable to sex or occupation. As with this study, Schwab used only classroom teachers, however, his randomly sampled population contained both regular and special education teachers, as did Raison's when considering this variable. This study concentrated specifically on special educators.

Recommendations

A replication of this study with other helping professions and with a group of regular educators, is in order to allow for comparisons among professions. Other studies might use a qualitative approach to investigate why males appear to be more "burned out".

Finding 5

There were no significant differences between groups when categorized by amount of student load, and no significant correlations were found between

increased size of daily student load and burnout.

Maslach and Pines (1978), in a study of 76 mental health workers, found that the greater the number of clients with which one must work: the more staff members disliked their jobs; tried to separate their jobs from their personal life; wanted to change jobs; limited after-hours involvement with clients; and the more concerned staff members were with working conditions rather than self fulfillments and socialization on the job. They predicted that as caseload increases, perceptions of burnout would increase. Barad (1979) found this to be the case with Social Security employees who had caseloads over 40 clients per day. These people scored high on Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and low on the Personal Accomplishment subscale. Cherniss, et al. (1976), in related research, found that teachers, social workers, and lawyers who had heavy caseloads initially had lower opinions of their work.

Bensky, et al., in a study involving special education teachers, found pupil load to be ranked as the most stressful job factor by self-contained classroom teachers, while resource room teachers ranked it as the second most stressful factor confronting them on their jobs. From the results of Bensky, et al. then, it would appear as if student load is less of a factor in burnout among resource room teachers than it is among self-contained teachers.

In summary, investigators have found increased client or student load to be an important factor in job dissatisfaction and stress/burnout. The findings of this study are contrary to those listed above.

Recommendations

Future research endeavors might investigate differences between grade levels taught when these teachers have the same adjusted daily load. Perhaps when that load is comprised of the same students in elementary school, rather than different students for each class period, a differentiation between

grade level with respect to burnout might become evident.

Also, a comparison among regular education teachers with similar student loads, but different amounts of special education students within that group, might be compared in order to assess the effect of special education student load on burnout among regular educators. Also, the effect, if any, of the type of special education student could be assessed.

Finding 6

When teachers were divided into categories according to reported area of their college preparation, significant differences were found with respect to burnout. When compared with those whose pre-service education was in special education, or an area other than special or regular education, special educators who had been trained in regular education experienced more frequent and intense feelings of personal accomplishment, yet also experienced stronger negative feelings toward their special education students. Perhaps the emphasis on curriculum and the teaching of academics, which is stressed in regular education preservice, is more important to experiencing success in public school special education than is the less pronounced academic oriented emphasis of traditional special education training. On the other hand, however, perhaps a lack of knowledge of intervention techniques contributes to the increased feelings of depersonalization and negative attitudes toward special education students. Another possibility is that special education students are more difficult to teach and present more difficulties with respect to teaching, causing the increased negative feelings while giving one a greater sense of accomplishment in being able to teach these children.

Recommendations

Future research might investigate if the findings regarding academic

preparation hold true for both resource room and self-contained classroom teachers. Additionally, the type of student taught might be a factor to be investigated with respect to these findings.

Finding 7

A significant correlation between increased years of teaching experience and lessened feelings of emotional exhaustion was revealed. However, when the effects of age were controlled for, the correlation became non-significant.

The teachers in this study were also categorized into the following groups: one to three years, four to six years, seven to ten years, eleven to fifteen years, and over fifteen years of teaching experience.

Teachers with one to three, and seven to ten years of experience had significantly more frequent feelings of emotional exhaustion than the other three groupings. On the dimension assessing strength of emotional exhaustion, those with over fifteen years of teaching experience fared better than their counterparts in the other four groupings by having significantly weaker feelings of emotional exhaustion.

These findings are in contrast to those of Schwab (1980), who found no significant differences between groups with respect to burnout on the years of teaching experience variable.

Recommendations

Future studies might investigate why differences exist between groups for special educators in this study, but not within Schwab's random sampling of teachers. Other studies might investigate whether adult stages of development have an effect on the results attributed to years of teaching experience.

Finding 8

A Pearson correlation procedure revealed that as one spends more time in

one's present teaching position, intensity and frequency of feelings of emotional exhaustion decrease. However, when controlling for the effects of age, these correlations become non-significant.

When the special educators in this study were categorized into one of the following groups: one to three years, four to six years, seven to ten years, eleven to fifteen years, or over fifteen years in present assignment, no significant differences were found between groups with respect to any aspect of burnout.

Finding 9

Teachers were grouped into a category dependent on the size of the community in which they taught. Towns are listed according to size by the State of Connecticut and categories are: (a) large city; (b) fringe city; (c) medium city; (d) small town-suburban; (e) small town-emerging suburb; (f) small town-rural. No significant correlations were found between size of district and burnout and no significant differences were found between groups, indicating that size of community does not have an effect on burnout.

These findings are in agreement with those of Schwab (1980) who found no differences between groups of teachers teaching in urban, suburban, or rural areas.

Finding 10

Teachers were asked to answer the following question: "If you were free to choose, would you: (a) stay in your present position; (b) change to another job in education; (c) change fields?" When special educators were grouped into the categories of: (a) would stay in education; (b) would change fields; or (c) is undecided, significant differences were found between the groups. Those who would change fields were more emotionally exhausted from their jobs

and had stronger negative feelings toward their students.

Recommendations

Although Maslach (1978) states that job dissatisfaction and burnout are not synonymous constructs, research involving teachers (Anderson, 1980; Sweeney, 1981) does indicate a possible connection. In addition, results of this study would point to a connection between lowered satisfaction with one's job and perceived feelings of burnout. Future research efforts might further investigate this relationship.

Findings for Null Hypothesis 4

Ho_4 For each of the pairs of variables, there will be no significant difference between the simple correlation and each of the partial correlations obtained with statistical control of the combinations of the remaining variables.

No significant differences were found, therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Summary of Findings

The following factors were found to be related to burnout: locus of control, age, sex, area of college preparation, years of experience, and desire to remain in teaching.

The following factors were found not to be related to burnout: teaching position, grade level taught, type of child taught, level of education, student load, size of district, and marital status.

General Recommendations

This research endeavor has investigated a number of factors in their relationship to burnout among special educators. The findings of the study will assist in a better understanding of this phenomenon and have implications for future research.

From the findings, it appears that many background factors effect one's perception of burnout. A greater understanding of why differences exist is necessary if effective strategies for the prevention or relief of the phenomenon are to be devised. Future research should focus on investigating each dimension of burnout and the factors specifically related to it, and attempt to investigate, in depth, precisely why these factors influence perceptions of burnout. If, for example, a certain age group appears to be less burned out than other age categories on intensity of feelings of personal accomplishment, what aspects of their personal or professional lives influence these perceptions? Perhaps then, individuals in other age groupings could adjust their lifestyles in some way in order to better cope with burnout.

In addition, further investigation into the relationship between locus of control and burnout is indicated to determine if one's locus of control makes one more susceptible to burnout, or if locus of control changes as one is "burning out". If locus of control is found to be causal in burnout, teachers with an external locus of control could engage in counseling, programming, preservice or inservice directed toward changing their locus of control toward a more internal orientation.

In conclusion, future research should build upon the findings and recommendations of this and other studies. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies are both indicated, and an investigation into actual versus perceived burnout might be undertaken. A comparison between teaching, and business or social service organizations might also be appropriate in order to determine if differences exist between professions.

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